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The Movements of the Idiot: Are We All Ironic Now?

SELF-KNOWLEDING IDIOCY: WE EITHER JOIN IN OR SHUT UP.

10/01/2016 Michael Eden Society



Are we all idiots now?

Firstly, it is useful to have in mind a clear example of the term 'idiot'. Since many of the attacks on our senses come from audiovisual media, it makes sense to illustrate this 'idiot' with reference to that medium. Britney Spears serves well to give us a clear image of the idiot's plight (let me say now that I use the term idiot both corrosively and in utmost sympathy, since only an idiot can have a genuinely tragic experience).

Spears's video 'Everytime' perfectly displays the totally embedded nature of the idiot who fully believes their own truth. In the video Spears acts out the tragic circumstances of a popular star (played by Spears herself) who, hounded by the press, loses her boyfriend and flirts with suicide in a bath. The hypocrisy is obvious: Spears has long pursued fame and exploited herself in creating a marketing phenomenon, and in the process has become a multi-millionaire. Yet her indulgent self-pity is not just an act (as her public breakdown shows us). Nevertheless, she is unable to see the ways she has created this problem, has an evident blind spot, and targets in her video the very forces which propelled her to her own vision of success.

Spears's position is tragic, her blind spot is genuine. Like so many of us, she is an idiot. However, only from the fully engaged position of the idiot can we experience a truly tragic fall into awareness.



The post-modern cynic would resist this assertion. He/she is a nihilist who claims to have 'seen through' things, and as a consequence, is justified in mocking both the idiot and the critic.

In a meaningless universe though, the nihilist's so-called truth is as pointless as the idiot's, so why crow so hard about it? Where does the motivation to do so come from? It is not the facts that a nihilist is interested in, what they want from their meaningless universe is permission to be a coward, to abdicate from the pressure of making meaning and giving force to ideas. The Idiot offends the nihilist's assumed position of wise man, leaving him in the role of coward without a project!

The Movements of the Central Idiot

The 1st movement (the idiot embedded)

The cynical application of irony leads to a kind of slide into stupidity. In the first instance mentioned above the 'idiot' is before us, we see them engaged in their behaviour giving force to an idea: we are free to identify or resist and be critical. The position of critic is with us in the audience.



Britney Spears's overblown self-pity stands for the idiotic or naive truth; despite our alertness to the hypocrisy and overall trashiness of the work, there is nevertheless a fascination which is easily exploited.

The 2nd movement (The idiot and critic become one)

This exploitation is exaggerated and illustrated perfectly in Lily Allen's music video for her song 'The Fear'. Here the idiot is 'played at' by the performer (indeed we might imagine that Allen has performers like Spears in mind in her mannerisms and in the critical thrust of the lyrics). Allen's performance indicates her superiority (with her knowing glances and self-aware statements) while simultaneously exploiting her own femininity/sexuality in the formalistic structure of the music video. As such this manoeuvre feeds both the appetite and fascination for the exploited idiot, and the critical position synonymous with credibility and self-awareness.



In this instance we identify with the dualistic critic/idiot who is in both positions throughout. We can enjoy the cliché whilst distancing ourselves from this enjoyment. What we don't register as quickly is how our critical self is now, at least in part, projected onto the figure of the idiot rather than with us in the audience. This position is the most prevalent and potent risk to actual criticism, but once an appetite for this is cultivated, further 'slide' is inevitable....

'The Fear' https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q-wGMSuX_c

The 3rd movement (explicit criticism is out and is only implied by the central idiot/critic)

In the third stage of the slide the overt critical posturing is jettisoned totally. The central figure is still the self-knowing idiot, but now much more in a kind of Andy Warhol deadpan guise. Continuing the music video examples, this is best illustrated by the performer Psy and his worldwide hit 'Gangnam Style'.

The video and lyrics are no longer attacking anything, it suffices that the chorus and dance stands for a self-aware ridiculous act performed in unison with the other self-aware ironic people (who express their solidarity in the galloping self-mocking act). Here criticism is gone, only the dead smirk of the central figure remains to reassure us. The position of the idiot is focused on Psy, but we are implicated and expected to get involved. Note the many parodies and viewer responses.



It no longer makes sense to say this is foolish, since the act is an act of self-knowing idiocy. We either join in or shut up. Just when you thought it couldn't get any worse... further slide is possible.

Read on: [Are We All Ironic now? Part Two](#)

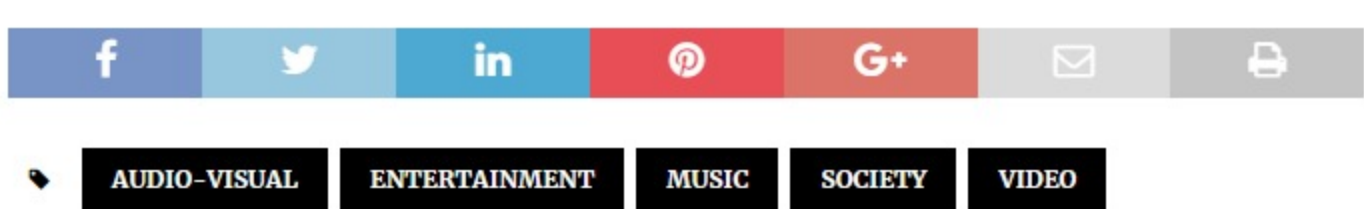


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Michael Eden is the Arts Editor for Trebuchet Magazine, an artist and researcher working in London and the south east, his artistic practice is concentrated on painting and he divides his time between this and lecturing in art history and contextual studies.



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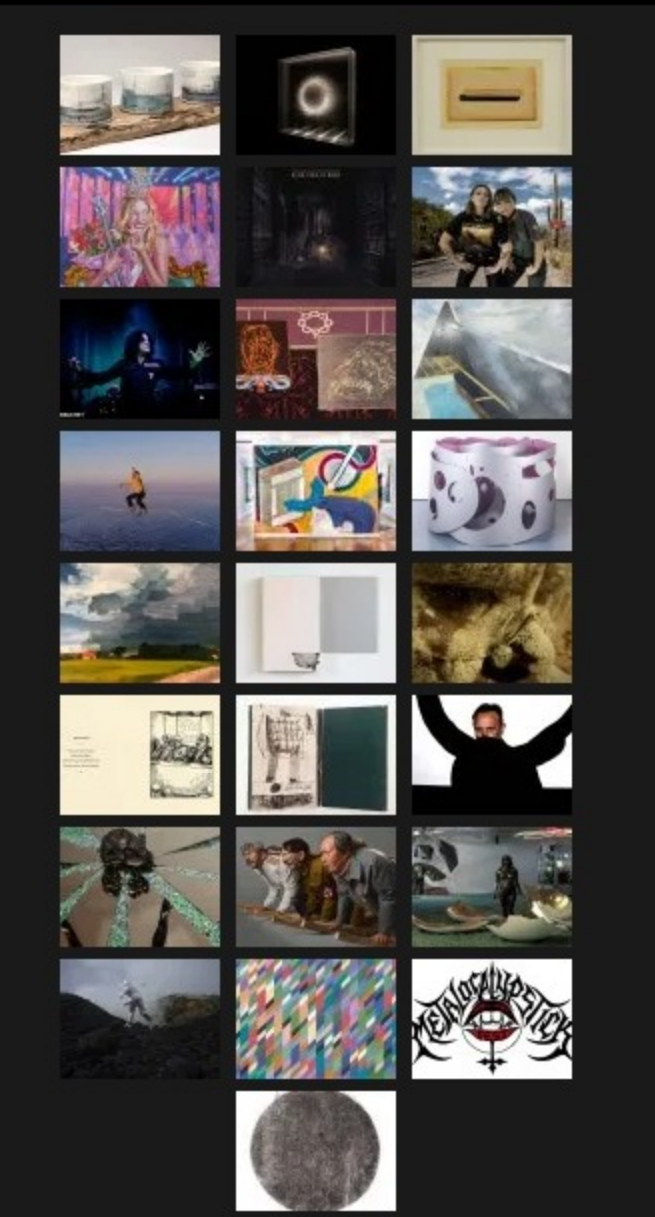
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